

**Montgomery County Council CIP Hearing
FY2024 Capital Budget and the Amended FY23-28 CIP
February 7, 2023
Written Testimony of Melissa McKenna**

Good evening. My name is Melissa McKenna. I'm delighted to see more municipal representation and more up-county representation. Hopefully, many of the issues I raise will resonate with you.

As the County focuses on Equity and Access, I am compelled to stress looking beyond skin color and the rainbow and remember our differently abled residents. Mobility and vision challenges abound. ADA Compliance should not be a use it or lose it funding category. I strongly disagree with the County Executive; there should never be a "savings" on ADA modifications because the money wasn't spent. Please return to the approved FY23 budget of \$4.4M. I feel Ms. Koenick's pain, as I did that of Pat O'Neill, Dr. Judy Docca, and Dr. Seth Morgan, in easily accessing our county government and schools. At the very least, the money could be used to help the City of Rockville with sidewalk ADA access to County buildings. Or that \$1.5M could go to MCPS specifically earmarked for Burning Tree Elementary School or Wootton High School ADA improvements.

With Equity there also needs to be Fairness. This is an off year for the CIP and many new projects are introduced. In the zero sum game that is the CIP budget, with constrained Spending Affordability Guidelines, something will have to give to finance these projects. The challenge right now is coming up with the money to meet escalating costs on projects already underway. The MCPS FACT queue existed for a reason, to prevent new projects from jumping ahead of those waiting patiently in line.

Please press pause on new projects and instead consider the many unfulfilled promises that have waited too long already:

- Rockville Fire Station #3
- Eastern Middle School- new middle school holding facility
- Clarksburg Library
- Observation Drive extended

February 2014 was my first council CIP testimony, it included support of a paltry \$500,000 from the County for partial funding towards the renovation of Rockville Fire Station #3. Time check: it's a decade later and this is still deferred? Please, work with the City of Rockville to make sure this most important adequate public facility is funded without delay. (NB: That would be the responding station should anything happen here or in the Executive Office Building.)

Eastern Middle School has been "TBD" for as long as I can remember, that too is at least 10 years. Farquhar, Odessa Shannon (the old Lee Middle School), and now Neelsville Middle Schools could proceed because they had neighboring land on which to build the new school while "holding" in their old school. The old Woodward High School had been serving as the middle school holding school for Tilden. Now, it will be a high school holding school for Northwood High School. Long story short—MCPS needs a middle school holding facility and it does not have one. Until it does, Eastern will continue to languish. Those students and staff have suffered long enough in their Nixon-era buildings. Instead of adding another project into MCPS major capital projects, recognizing that all are worthy and desperately needed, please deliver on broken promises first. That means a new middle school holding school for the entire county, providing space to house Eastern and Banneker Middle School students during construction.

When I testified in 2020, I tried to say “Yay, the Clarksburg Library is in the CIP,” but planning money wasn’t allocated until FY24 and construction money in FY26, making the project a “pretty promise.” Here we are in 2023, and those FY24 and FY26 funding dates remain. I urge you to keep them on schedule. As Mr. Guan remarked earlier this afternoon, it is well past time that the Clarksburg Master Plan be implemented. Clarksburg has been patient; yet, over a decade later the community remains incomplete.

Which naturally brings me to Observation Drive Extended. We are not all commuters, and the suburbs still require personal transportation. Road infrastructure in the Upcounty has been neglected for too long. Please accelerate this schedule. That should include the completion of MidCounty Highway. I echo Mr. Nelson’s testimony of this afternoon and can hear Rosemary Arkoian’s, persistent, playful, pestering to get Midcounty Highway completed.

The six-year CIP is a funny creature. It’s a really big scary number to handle all at once. It includes immediate projects and long-range planning. When the money is tight, the magic to making the numbers work is to shift funding into the “out years,” or years 3 through 6. This delays projects while still being able to say they are in the six-year CIP. Truth is, only the first 2 years matter. Those of us involved with schools know not to count on school funding until there’s a shovel in the ground.

As far as schools go, the new batch of elephants—the three new high schools—never had a chance of being on schedule in the same 6-year CIP. Too many big ticket items in too little time.

How much do you think a new high school costs? Nope. Not even close. I used to call Seneca Valley High School the Tesla Model X. That now pales in comparison with **Northwood, Woodward, and Crown High Schools**. All **exceed \$194M EACH**. Northwood High School tops out at \$203M. The County Executive mentions leveraging state aid from the Built to Learn Act... keep in mind that Montgomery forward funds our school construction, receiving state aid AFTER project completion. And then only about 37% of the total cost.

It’s not only about fully funding the MCPS CIP, which has actually happened in the past. It’s just that the CIP has not been fully funded for 6 years in a row to allow for all projects to be completed.

My greatest concern after the cost of MCPS projects is **how** facilities are being built. We don’t need architectural masterpieces and grand edifices for schools. We need safe, healthy, functional, up-to-date, technologically modern, and environmentally responsible buildings. MCPS should **ONLY** be planning and building Net Zero Energy schools.

Something incredible happened in March 2021—a record opening of seven new schools!! The last of the rev/ex series: Three ES, one MS, one HS, and two co-located special education schools. Sadly, COVID-19 delayed their opening and erased the significance of the occasion. With LEED-Gold certified schools dating back to 2007, that last rev/ex class of 2021 were **only barely** built to LEED-Silver certification 12 years later! Why?

How many of them had solar on the roof? **ZERO**. Having attended the virtual design meetings for both the new Woodward and Crown High Schools, I can report that **NEITHER** has solar included in the preliminary design. Why not?

There are many choices to make in constructing schools. New building techniques reduce embodied carbon, yield incredible energy savings, use solar and geothermal energy, and most importantly can be built at a cost similar to traditional construction. Graceland Park Middle School and Holabird Elementary

School in Baltimore City were built at a cost comparable to the MCPS average at the time. (pre-pandemic pricing of course, and also pre-prevailing wage pricing).

The Council and County Executive have been very clear about our County's commitment to using renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, even planning new County buildings to be net zero energy, such as the new White Flint Fire Station #23.

Net Zero Energy schools should be mandatory, as should Building Energy Performance Standards reporting for MCPS. Renewable energy must be incorporated in new school designs from the beginning. "Net Zero Ready" begins at the foundation; it's not an aftermarket add on.

As I always ask the Board of Education, spend wisely, and please, show your work.

Thank you.

Melissa McKenna